Study of Pastoral Ministries with the Early Church Fathers!

Over the years I have developed a love for the writings of the early Church Fathers. Especially their letters on the topic of Pastoral Theology and Ecclesiology (the study of the Doctrine of the Church), a study in the why and how we do ministry.

Included in this study-guide is two the Early Church writers that address the topic in a very profound and prolific way. I pray that your blessed as you spend time thinking about your personal ministry and how it is impacting others:

All the study-guide questions are by Rev. Don Allen, Jr. PhD, the writings of the Early Church Fathers have been left unchanged.

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Study-guide One:

“The duties of presbyters and others by Polycarp:”

One of the writers I truly like is Polycarp (69 AD – 155 AD)

There is something about this awesome man of God that demands us to stop and think about the words he writes, how they challenge us at the very core of our beliefs, knowing that he most likely was a close friend of many of the people that had been in Jerusalem at the time of Christ, and most likely had heard the ministry of the Apostle John.

As with many who never learned to speak Greek, Hebrew, or other languages used in the early 1st and 2nd century, I’m thankful to Bible scholars and theologians such as Philip Schaff (1819-1893) who so graciously translated these awesome works for all of us to read.

I’m also grateful to the wonderful folks at CCEL for spending the thousands of hours to download the great works of not only the Early Church Fathers, but thousands of greater writers so that they are reversed in one place for us to study and read. The following chapter for our study-guide is taken from the book: “The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, Introductory Note to the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians”[1]

The following Chapter written by Polycarp is one that I believe as pastor, student, and college professor that every pastor and student should study and develop a clear understanding. Please read the following short but challenging paragraph, and then take time to review the questions, as you pray, and challenge your heart and mind with the question “Are you the pastor God wants you to be?”

Chapter VI: The duties of presbyters and others.

[1] http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.iv.i.html

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And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always "providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man;" abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment; keeping far off from all covetousness, not quickly crediting [an evil report] against any one, not severe in judgment, as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin. If then we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive; for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and "we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must every one give an account of himself." Let us then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, even as He Himself has commanded us, and as the apostles who preached the Gospel unto us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord [have alike taught us]. Let us be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord, and draw away vain men into error. (Rom. xii. 17; 2 Cor. viii. 31; 375 Matt. vi. 12–14.; 376 Rom. xiv. 10–12; 2 Cor. v. 10.)

Now that you have read the chapter in its entirety, let's break it down and answer some simple or not so simple questions. Polycarp is asking each of us about the fulfillment of our role as pastor. Please take time to reflect on the question and answer honestly. Please keep in mind my purpose is to challenge your thinking, your comfort zone, and your personal beliefs concerning the calling as pastor, bishop, or presbyter.

1. *And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all,*

    - As a pastor when have you been as compassionate to those you serve as God has instructed in his word to be?

    - How do you feel that God is leading you to show more compassion to those in your flock and community?

2. *bringing back those that wander*,

    - Do you personally consider it a part of your responsibility as a pastor to minister (witness) to and seek the loss, and bring them into a relationship with Christ? What are some of the most effective means of accomplishing this?

    - Do you believe that your view falls within the scriptural teaching of Christ, apostles, and scripture, why or why not?

3. *visiting all the sick,*

- At the time Polycarp wrote this chapter, they didn't have hospitals. As a pastor you were expected to visit the sick in their home. As a pastor how often do you feel that visiting the sick both in the hospital, nursing home, and their home is necessary?

- When you visit in the hospital, nursing home, or home, do you make it a point to pray with the sick, encourage them from scripture, and assure them that God is in control? What responses have you seen to these actions?

4. *and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always "providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man;"*

    - What is your view of the pastors and churches responsibility of ministering to the poor, hurting, and suffering?

    - Have you lead your church or taken any personal action to assist the widow, orphan, or poor within your own congregation or community, and how did the church respond?

5. *abstaining from all wrath (Anger),*

    - Do you keep your temper under control; do you get angry with individuals within your family, church, or maybe even God easily?

    - What have you found that works to help you with getting upset or angry? Who do you have in your life that you can talk to when you're angry or upset instead of showing the anger?

6. *respect of persons*,

    - How do you show respect to your family, friends, and individuals within your church or community? And how important do you feel it is show respect? Do you believe that

God/Christ had respect for everybody regardless of their nationality, gender, etc.?

- What could you do different that would show individuals that you have respect for them, regardless of their race, gender, etc?

7. *and unjust judgment*;

   - We all make judgments of people, as a pastor. What have you began to do in your personal life to stop this?

8. *keeping far off from all covetousness*,

   - As a pastor we often struggle with the concept that we deserve what others have. We believe we should have a bigger church, nicer parsonage, more money, newer car, etc. How do you cope with and overcome these thoughts to remain focused on the task of preaching the gospel?

9. *not quickly crediting [an evil report] against anyone*,

   - Gossip is often hard to avoid. However, as a pastor it is essential for us to stay above the gossip in our church and community. What have you learned to do so you don't fall into the trap of gossiping?

10. *not severe in judgment, as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin*.

    - How important is it to you to be careful of judging others in your church, especially before you know all the facts?

11. *If then we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive; for we are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and "we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must every one give an account of himself." Let us then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, even as*

    - How hard is it to forgive those that hurt you? Thousands of Pastors (great men of God) are out of the ministry today

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because they couldn’t or wouldn’t forgive the hurt. How have you learned to pray and forgive those that hurt you?

12. *He Himself has commanded us, and as the apostles who preached the Gospel unto us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord [have alike taught us]. Let us be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord, and draw away vain men into error. (374 Rom. xii. 17; 2 Cor. viii. 31; 375 Matt. vi. 12–14.; 376 Rom. xiv. 10–12; 2 Cor. v. 10.)*

- Where are you willing to preach the Gospel and why?

Study Guide Two:

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO POLYCARP

Ignatius of Antioch (Ancient Greek: Ἰγνάτιος, also known as Theophorus from Greek Θεοφόρος "God-bearer") (ca. 35 or 50-between 98 and 117)[1] was among the Apostolic Fathers, was the third Bishop and Patriarch of Antioch, and was a student of John the Apostle. En route to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius wrote a series of letters which have been preserved as an example of very early Christian theology. Important topics addressed in these letters include ecclesiology, the sacraments, and the role of bishops.[2]

The following translation of Epistle of IGNATIUS to Polycarp from:

The Apostolic Fathers (1891 translation) J. B. Lightfoot's Translation (Joseph Barber Lightfoot (13 April 1828 – 21 December 1889) was an English theologian and Bishop of Durham, usually known as J.B. Lightfoot.)

INTRODUCTION:

Ignatius, who is also Theophorus, unto Polycarp who is bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans or rather who hath for his bishop God the Father and Jesus Christ, abundant greeting.

CHAPTER 1

1:1 Welcoming thy godly mind which is grounded as it were on an immovable rock, I give exceeding glory that it hath been vouchsafed me to see thy blameless face, whereof I would fain have joy in God.

? Who is your mind grounded in God or someone else?

[2]Ignatius of Antioch http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatius_of_Antioch as of May 20, 2010

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1:2 I exhort thee in the grace wherewith thou art clothed to press forward in thy course and to exhort all men that they may be saved. Vindicate thine office in all diligence of flesh and of spirit. Have a care for union, than which there is nothing better. Bear all men, as the Lord also beareth thee. Suffer all men in love, as also thou doest.

- Do you have this same compassion for the loss that Ignatius states Polycarp has for his loss?

1:3 Give thyself to unceasing prayers. Ask for larger wisdom than thou hast. Be watchful, and keep thy spirit from slumbering. Speak to each man severally after the manner of God. Bear the maladies of all, as a perfect athlete. Where there is more toil, there is much gain.

- Ignatius writes about having a Godly mind, do you agree with his statements and in your opinion what is your mind grounded in?

- What does the author set as important things the pastor should do in chapter one?

CHAPTER 2

2:1 If thou lovest good scholars, this is not thankworthy in thee. Rather bring the more pestilent to submission by gentleness. All wounds are not healed by the same salve. Allay sharp pains by omentations.

2:2 _Be thou prudent as the serpent_ in all things _and guileless_ always _as the dove._ Therefore art thou made of flesh and spirit, that thou mayest humour the things which appear before thine eyes; and as for the invisible things, pray thou that they may be revealed unto thee; that thou mayest be lacking in nothing, but mayest abound in every spiritual gift.

2:3 The season requireth thee, as pilots require winds or as a storm-tossed mariner a haven, that it may attain unto God. Be sober, as God's athlete. The prize is incorruption and life eternal, concerning which thou also art persuaded. In all things I am devoted to thee -- I and my bonds which thou didst cherish.

- Do you like good scholars work, and would personally consider the writing of Ignatius to be scholarly work?

- Are you working towards the prize?

CHAPTER 3

3:1 Let not those that seem to be plausible and yet teach strange doctrine dismay thee. Stand thou firm, as an anvil when it is smitten. It is the part of a great athlete to receive blows and be victorious. But especially must we for God's sake endure all things, that He also may endure us.

3:2 Be thou more iligent than thou art. Mark the seasons. Await Him that is above every season, the Eternal, the Invisible, who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, the Impassible, who suffered for our sake, who endured in all ways for our sake.

- Why are you doing the things you do?

- Would you agree with the following statement: What happens in the church must follow the desire of Christ?

CHAPTER 4

4:1 Let not widows be neglected. After the Lord be hou their protector. Let nothing be done without thy consent; neither do thou anything without the consent of God, as indeed thou doest not. Be stedfast.

4:2 Let meetings be held more frequently. Seek out all men by name.

4:3 Despise not slaves, whether men or women. Yet let not these again be puffed up, but let them serve the more faithfully to the glory of God, that they may obtain a better freedom from God. Let them not desire to be set free at the public cost, lest they be found slaves of lust.

- How important is the Pastor role in the church to teach the doctrine of the church?

- How important is it for you to know who you are ministering to?

- People serve in church not because of the place in society, but their place in God eyes.

CHAPTER 5

5:1 Flee evil arts, or rather hold thou discourse about these. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In like manner also charge my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, _as the Lord loved the Church._

5:2 If anyone is able to abide in chastity to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him so abide without boasting. If he boast, he is lost; and if it be known beyond the bishop, he is polluted. It becometh men and women too, when they marry, to unite themselves with the consent of the bishop, that the marriage may be after the Lord and not after concupiscence. Let all things be done to the honour of God.

- Do you agree with the author about how important it is to strengthen your relationship with your family?

- Would you agree that it is important for men and women to seek Godly wisdom in your marriage?

- Does everything you do give honor to God?

CHAPTER 6

6:1 Give ye heed to the bishop, that God also may give heed to you. I am devoted to those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, the deacons. May it be granted me to have my portion with them in the presence of God. Toil together one with another, struggle together, run together, suffer together, lie down together, rise up together, as God's stewards and assessors and ministers.

6:2 Please the Captain in whose army ye serve, from whom also ye will receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism

abide with you as you shield; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as your body armour. Let your works be your deposits, that ye may receive your assets due to you. Be ye therefore long-suffering onewith another in gentleness, as God is with you. May have joy of you always.

As I (Don Allen, Jr) read this awesome letter written by Ignatius to his friend Polycarp declares three types relationship.

- Pastors relationship to the church leadership.
- Church member's relationship to their local pastor.
- Member's relationship to each other.

? How are you building these relationships in your life?

? These men had a fear that many know fall away abandon their call, what would it take for you to abandon the ministry?

CHAPTER 7

7:1 Seeing that the church which is in Antioch of Syria hath peace, as it hath been reported to me, through your prayers, I myself also have been the more comforted since God hath banished my care; if so be I may through suffering attain unto God, that I may befound a disciple through your intercession.

7:2 It becometh thee, most blessed Polycarp, to call together a godly council and to elect some one among you who is very dear to you and zealous also, who shall be fit to bear the name of God's courier – to appoint him, I say, that he may go to Syria and glorify your zealous love unto the glory of God.

7:3 A Christian hath no authority over himself, but giveth his time to God. This is God's work, and yours also, when ye shall complete it: for I trust in the Divine grace, that ye are ready for an act of well-doing which is meet for God. Knowing the fervour of your sincerity, I have exhorted you in a short letter.

? Who work are you doing, yours or Gods?

? Would you agree that this chapter talks about sending missionary?

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- Are you willing to be a missionary?

CHAPTER 8

8:1 Since I have not been able to write to all the churches, by reason of my sailing suddenly from Troas to Neapolis, as the Divine will enjoineth, thou shalt write to the churches in front, as one possessing the mind of God, to the intent that they also may do this same thing -- let those who are able send essengers, and the rest letters by the persons who are sent by thee, that ye may be glorified by an ever memorable deed -- for this is worthy of thee.

8:2 I salute all by name, and especially the wife of Epitropus with her whole household and her children's. I salute Attalus my beloved. I salute him that hall be appointed to go to Syria. Grace shall be with him always, and with Polycarp who sendeth him.

8:3 I bid you farewell always in our God Jesus Christ, in whom abide ye in the unity and supervision of God. I salute Alce, a name very dear to me. Fare yewell in the Lord.

It is interesting to me that Ignatius asked Polycarp to contact other pastors and encourage them in the Christian walk.

- Are you willing to be an encouragement to other pastors or fellow Christians?

- Who are you encouraging daily in their Christian walk?

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